

Trust and Deception in (Post-)Soviet Uzbekistan

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Summary:

The breakdown of the Soviet Union together with the dissolution of the socialist order was experienced as a painful severance from a life people in Uzbekistan had been intimately familiar with. The emotional response aroused by Uzbek independence becomes apparent in oral accounts of trust and deception. The older generation tends to view the past as having been a time of mutual trust, while acts of hostility and deception are seen as characteristic of the post-Soviet social condition. Younger people are, in comparison, more temperate in their evaluation of the current social environment. Nevertheless, there seems to be some agreement that one must still exercise caution in interactions with others if trouble is to be avoided. I suggest that such an outlook may also be indicative of an uncertainty with regard to appropriate agency among Uzbeks both young and old.

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Introduction

For the people of Uzbekistan, life did not change abruptly on September 1, 1991 with the declaration of independence, nor with the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25 of the same year. The policies of perestroika and especially of glasnost — the latter permitting a more open discussion of political and social issues as well as a freer dissemination of information — had an impact on the way Uzbek people thought and went about their everyday lives. After independence the formerly omnipresent state withdrew only gradually from the many spheres of daily life that it had previously been involved in, consequently leaving citizens to cope by themselves with their economic and social problems.

Still, as I shall argue, we need to understand how many people must have experienced a form of rupture — of being violently severed from the past — in their transition to a post-Soviet mode of existence. Soviet indoctrination had hitherto been too thorough, enveloping all areas of life in order to wholly absorb the individual.¹ If all of one's efforts were aimed at the achievement of a collective goal — namely

¹ According to Huber (2006: 130–131), socialist states were working toward substituting interpersonal relations with relations between the individual and the state; as perceived by critically minded subjects, this represented an intrusion into the private sphere. See also, Hosking (2013: 19).